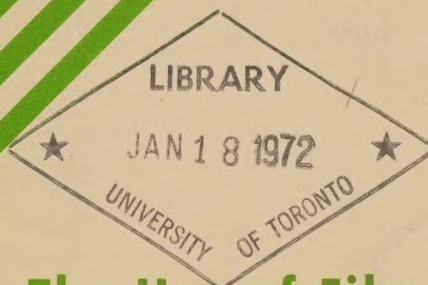


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The Use of Films for Adult Education in an Indian-Eskimo Community

by B. and J.W. Eades
Social Science Notes - 3



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Northern Science Research Group,
Department of Indian Affairs and
Northern Development.

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The Use of Films for Adult Education

In An Indian-Eskimo Community

By Betty and J. William Eades

This report is based on research carried out while the author was employed by the Northern Science Research Group. The **opinions** expressed, however, are those of the author and not those of the Department.

Requests for copies of this report should be addressed to the Chief, Northern Science Research Group, Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development.

Northern Science Research Group,
Department of Indian Affairs and Northern
Development,
Ottawa, September 1971.

ABSTRACT

This report deals with an experiment in adult education, conducted in an Indian, Eskimo and Metis community of the Mackenzie Delta.

With the precedent of the Newfoundland "Challenge for Change" program in mind, selected films were shown to audiences in Aklavik. The purpose was to help the viewers gain insight into the problems and workings of their own community, their relationship to similar communities and to the Canadian whole.

The films were instrumental in reducing inaccurate and stereotyped knowledge of the "southern" world, and reaction to them varied according to age and ethnic group. The experiment showed a need for increased adult-education on specific topics; the possibilities for local involvement using video-tape equipment, and for an exchange between settlements, of filmed information on the conduct of community affairs.

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Throughout the report I have used the pronoun "we" rather than "I" as my husband was as actively interested and involved in the project as I was.

INTRODUCTION

For many years film has been used as an educational tool -- an audio-visual aid in a learning situation. This was generally utilized in the formal classroom, in which the situation was very often directed by the teachers, with the students passive viewers for the most part. In recent years however, there has been a trend towards more involvement by the viewers of the films, and the use of film has extended far beyond a classroom or formal learning situation. Through such efforts as the Challenge for Change program and others, people have been encouraged to make more use of the communication media, particularly film and video-tape, and with these tools become actively involved in directing themselves toward social change.

In Aklavik, the approach we used with film was not a traditional-type formal learning situation, but neither was it one in which the people filmed their own community and analyzed it. Whereas the latter type approach would also be of great value to a northern community such as Aklavik, we felt that there was value in using films already available to help the people gain a greater insight into their own community, as it exists in relation to other communities and to the rest of Canada. We hoped that there would be aspects of life in other parts of Canada with which the Aklavik natives could identify.

The realization that film was a valuable medium with which to work came several years ago while my husband and I were teaching in Gjoa Haven. At that time we used to have weekly film shows using the school "film blocks", usually made up of National Film Board and other educational films. Each Friday evening the school would be crowded with an attentive audience of Eskimos, almost none of whom could speak English. Often due to a scarcity

of new films there would be "re-runs". To our surprise these "re-runs" were most popular and proved to be an effective instructional tool in broadening the horizons of these adult Eskimos. Each time a film was shown, something additional was gleaned from it; the films became like old friends and information in the films was remembered. Although there was a "language barrier" the people could, for example, see the similarities in the lives of Arctic hunters and those of a group of natives living in the South Pacific. I can remember one older Eskimo man saying, "They are going from old ways to new ways just like we are."

In Aklavik we found that despite the town's relatively long history of contact with people from the south or "outside", there existed in the minds of many of the Aklavik people a very sketchy and inadequate picture of what southern Canada was like. There was a tendency to believe that everyone in the South was wealthy, that all roads were paved; that there was no unemployment, no welfare, and that by contrast the people of Aklavik and other northern communities were destitute and disadvantaged. It is true, of course, that a good percentage of the people of Southern Canada have a much higher standard of living than many northern residents, but we felt that often this higher standard was all that northern natives saw and that they should also see a poorer aspect of the south: for example, rural Newfoundland with its unpaved roads, high percentage of people on welfare, people being caught in an economic squeeze due to low fish prices and high cost of living. In addition we wanted to show films depicting the life of the urban poor in places like Toronto or Montreal, where those on welfare don't have the opportunity of going out and setting a net, searching for caribou or getting a few rats to tide them over until the next bit of income comes in.

Another stereotype view that was prevalent in Aklavik, and which we felt could be offset perhaps with film, was the idea that "there is not much we can do to help ourselves; the government runs everything anyway." Films such as "The Indian Speaks", "This Land" and "Lake Man" were suitable for this purpose.

With the advent of television in Aklavik one might think that a film program such as the one attempted might be unnecessary, as many of the native people have television sets, and virtually all of the people have the opportunity of watching television. However, an analysis of the T.V. schedule revealed that the majority of the television programmes were not very realistic in what they depicted of the "outside". Shows such as the "Beverly Hillbillies", "Bonanza", "Governor and J.J.", "I Love Lucy" and "Gallopig Gourmet" -- all; with the possible exception of the last mentioned, very popular with the native people -- did not fill the need to widen horizons; in fact many of them helped, along with the commercial movies that came to town, to strengthen the stereotype views the natives had.

In discussing the television programme with the people in Aklavik, we also heard many comments from them wishing for television coverage of northern life. They wanted coverage of local and semi-local events. For example, when it was announced that the video-tape of the Arctic Winter Games held in Yellowknife would be shown on a Saturday evening, this was talked about with great excitement, and eagerly anticipated for a week.

SELECTION OF FILMS AND METHOD OF CARRYING OUT THE PROJECT

As criteria in choosing films for Aklavik we looked for:

- (a) films showing small communities in other parts of Canada,
- (b) films showing the poor of Canada -- rural and urban,
- (c) films showing native peoples of Canada, particularly those in which the people discuss their problems and way of life as they see them, not as outsiders see them,
- (d) films of the north, and those requested by the people themselves.

In searching for films to use it was apparent that there were many more films of the type we wanted on Indian life than on Eskimo life. Whereas there are several excellent films showing Indians discussing and working out their own problems, the films dealing with Eskimos are nearly all, if not all, descriptive, ethnographic type accounts of Eskimo life, many of them showing the traditional Eskimo culture. There seems to be a lack of films dealing with the social problems of the Arctic.

Also, as interest in the films developed we asked the people what they would like to see, to which they **responded** with requests for films on sports; wild life, and Indians or Eskimos of other parts of Canada.

We previewed some of the more radical "red power" films, but decided **against** showing them in Aklavik for several reasons. We didn't know how to predict the reactions to the films; whether or not the people would understand our motives in showing them, and thus whether or not the films would affect or jeopardize the people's understanding

of our own role in the community. We also felt that it was not our purpose to develop or foster anti-administration or anti-white reactions, or to alienate ourselves from the established agencies in Aklavik. At the time, the people of Aklavik were for the most part apathetic in their response to appeals from such organizations as the Indian Native Brotherhood and COPE. We thought this a very significant reason for avoiding films about political confrontation.

In deciding upon a location to show the films we had two possibilities: to show the films in our home to small groups of people, or the alternative of showing them in a public place such as the school auditorium. During the course of the project we used both places. Our first approach was to show the films to small groups in our home. The early films shown were such that they were suited more for small group showings. (Challenge for Change - Newfoundland Project). We also hoped that a small group in an informal atmosphere would create a better climate for discussion than a large hall, and that reactions to the films would be obtained more easily. Thus, with each group of films we had several showings of the programme with groups of 8-12 people in each group.

From these small group showings we got comments to the effect that the films would be greatly appreciated by the whole community, and that they were worth showing in a hall or at the school. On the basis of these **comments** we began to have public showings. The school principal allowed us to use the school auditorium during the school year but was not anxious to have it used during the summer holidays, and so during the months of July and August we used the Parish Hall of the Anglican Church.

When films were available we had weekly showings, although during March and April the arrival of films ordered was slow. During these months we had a change of

programmes approximately every two weeks. The main source of our films was the National Film Board of Canada.

We advertised our public showings in as many ways as possible: radio announcements, notices in the stores and post office, on telephone poles and on public notice boards. Our audience consisted mainly of native adults. Indians and Eskimos seemed to be present in equal proportions. Among the white population the teachers were generally disinterested; none attended any of the showings (other than one which we specifically invited them to see in our home.) Two or three of the rest of the white population attended one or two of the showings. The owner of the commercial theatre did not appear perturbed at the "competition". He usually had one night of the week on which he did not show a film and we generally tried to use that night for our showing. We excluded children from the showings for two reasons: many of the films were seen during the school year, and from observing children's behaviour in other public places we saw that they were a very disturbing element of any audience. Attendance ranged from 40 to 108 adults. During the spring ratting season when many of the people were out of town, we felt that these attendance figures were very encouraging.

One factor involved in the response from the native people is that there was a high entertainment value inherent in each film show. The people felt and often expressed to us the lack of activities in the community. Apart from curling in the winter and the commercial movie theatre there was "nowhere to go".

In addition to these public showings we showed one group of films to the teachers in our home, gave some of the films to the Grade 8 teacher for him to use in his guidance class, and made the film available to a home nursing class.

EVALUATION OF FILMS AND RESPONSES TO THEM

The following list does not include every film we showed. It is intended to show the main types of film used. We have not summarized the content of films discussed here, as they are listed with descriptive summaries in the catalogue of the National Film Board.

A. Challenge for Change - Newfoundland Project

In introducing these films we mentioned that they were about an area that was considered poor; where young people often have to leave home for lack of jobs; where 60% of the people are receiving some form of welfare assistance, etc. To these comments came responses such as "Just like Aklavik."

1. Introduction to Fogo Island: In this film the narrator uses a "high English" vocabulary, making some parts of it difficult for the natives to follow. The viewers were very interested in the scenes showing the types of fishing boats, the drying of the fish, etc. On reaction to the film was, "They don't look poor -- look at those houses and big cars."
2. Family Fishery: The Moores: The Newfoundland dialect of the husband in this film was very difficult to follow. Also weakening the effect of the film was the technique of the interviewer in the background, whose questions were inaudible. The film, more a personality sketch than one in which something was said, focusses on one family struggling to keep going. The viewers identified mainly with the welfare concept. (The wife in the film loudly and forcibly recounts her dealings with a

welfare officer who, she thought, had not dealt with her case properly.)

3. Andrew Swimm: Community Needs: Again the interviewer could not be heard. The Aklavik people recognized problems dealt with in the film similar to those in the north such as welfare and poor communication facilities. Those watching the film were very impressed with the fact that in the south there were places more isolated than Aklavik. "They don't have T.V. or radio!" One response to the discussion on welfare was, "What's the solution? -- They ask that question all the time. Nobody answers it.". The general reaction to these and other Newfoundland films was that "Aklavik is better off than many people think it is." Generally the people were surprised that there were places in the south that had poorer facilities, i.e., electricity, radio; television and sewage, than many northern communities.

B. Films Showing Urban Poverty:

1. The World of One in Five: It was difficult for some of the Aklavik people to see the poverty in this film. The families depicted for the most part lived in several rooms, had furniture comparable to or better than that found in many Aklavik homes, had running water, sat down to a meal, had a car sitting outside and appliances in the home, etc.

The film, however, was also shown to a Grade 8 Guidance class at the school. These young people ranging in age from 12-17 had a clearer image of how they thought whites or southerners

lived. They were shocked at the conditions in the film, "hadn't realized that life in the south could be like that." They were also shocked at the ratio "1 in 5".

All who saw the film agreed that if one were poor he was far better off living in a place like Aklavik than in a city, because of the availability of fish and game to supplement the cash income.

2. The Things I Cannot Change: This film, focussing on one Montreal family, had more of an impact than the "World of One in Five". Generally, however, the comments indicating the perception of the degree of poverty were similar to the above film. The eye-opening aspects of the film seemed to be:

- (1) husband involved in a street fight, police, etc.,
- (2) here is a white couple with a large family (10 children, husband unemployed,
- (3) the scene showing hundreds of men outside the unemployment bureau shocked even the more sophisticated Aklavik people.

This film seemed effective because of the contrast it presented to the type of white families that natives see in the north; i.e., white, middleclass family; one or two, if any, children; seemingly few material needs; immaculate, well-furnished homes, etc.

C. Films Showing Indian and Eskimo Life:

1. Attiuk: This film featured caribou hunters among the Montagnais Indians. It emphasizes the mystique of caribou hunting, "all hunts begin in dreams", "caribou spirit in the

drum and snowshoes", etc. Although the film tended to show the men living the "ideal bush life, it was very popular and requested for a repeat showing.

2. Lake Man: An account of Metis life at Lac la Biche. Alexi, the Metis featured in this film, seemed very real to the viewers. His life seemed to parallel that of many Aklavik people, even to the point of going on a "big binge", a fact that many viewers recognized and commented upon. It is a very realistic film, presented simply but effectively.

3. The Indian Speaks: We showed this film to several groups of people and from each there was a good response: the older Indians watched it very intently. The young people reacted favourably to the film and were willing to discuss it. The girls admired the young secretary, wanting to lead the life she did. The boys felt the same of Moriseau the artist. When asked if they thought Moriseau was "doing the right thing" by reviving old traditions these young people felt he was, "as long as he didn't completely reject the advantages of the white way of life;" i.e., they didn't approve of living completely native.

4. High Steel: We chose this film showing the Mohawk Indians on skyscraper construction in New York to present a group of Indians who were in this film superior to the white man and who had also adapted successfully to a "steady work" situation. Several of the audience had seen the film before. There was no real

indication that the Indians watching this film identified in any way with these workers.

5. This Land: The value of this film, dealing with a Nass River Indian tribe and its dispute over land rights, is that it shows a group of Indians who are organized; know what they want, are highly articulate about their problems and are managing their own affairs. Although it was watched with great interest it was difficult to see whether the viewers made any associations with their own experience. When questioned about this and other films like it, there was always a great reluctance to express opinions. "Did you like this film?" nearly always brought the response, "Yes, it was pretty good." "Do you think the people of Aklavik will ever run their own affairs like the Indians do in this film?" would bring a response of silence followed by, "I don't know." We used this film in one of the public showings at which there was a large audience. I think it is one that might provoke discussion if shown in a small informal group situation.

D. Films of Northern Life:

1. Land of the Long Day
2. High Arctic
3. Edge of the Barrens
4. Nahanni
5. Accessible Arctic

All of these films had been seen before by the people but were still popular, and of the type requested when we asked them what they would like to see. The photography of the wild life, particularly caribou and musk oxen in the "High

Arctic" and "Edge of the Barrens", were greatly enjoyed. "Nahanni" was also very popular.

E. Films Showing Communities in Other Parts of Canada:

This type of film seemed to meet the entertainment need for the people of Aklavik as well as to fulfil a sincere desire on their part to find out what the rest of Canada was like. The films contained little information with which the Aklavik people could identify, or could relate to Delta situations, and perhaps it was for this reason that they were not afraid to express opinions or make specific comments on the films. We introduced the films by telling where they were filmed, and making one or two comments about what the people did for a living, or the type of community it was.

1. Winter Sealing at La Tabatiere: The viewers were very impressed with the number of seals caught. Some of the older people couldn't comprehend the idea of white men sealing. "What country is that? Were those white men? Why do they need all those seals?"

2. The Baymen: The dialect in this film was very appealing to the Aklavik people because of its music; dancing; sense of excitement in capturing a white whale; and its light-hearted portrayal of French Canadian life, with humour in even the religious aspect. Only in the first reel, which was mainly conversation with much of it in French, did the people find it hard to follow. They were amused that anyone would go to such lengths to capture a whale, but they were also very

impressed with the fact that it was captured alive and taken to a New York aquarium.

F. Entertainment Type Film:

These were ordered in response to requests for films on sports, and were very popular when shown. We chose such films as "Wrestling", "Figure Skating", and "King of Blades". All of them were greatly enjoyed.

III

CONCLUSIONS

As mentioned above, it was generally difficult to get the people to discuss the films other than on a superficial level. Even during the breaks between films the viewers were often silent or hesitant in expressing opinions. We did get comments, however, indicating that the people were interested in the subjects of the films. One noticeable trend in these comments was that the viewers reacted to the people in the films to a greater degree than to such aspects as scenery, buildings, method of transportation, etc. For example the scenes showing such things as: the street fight between men, husband and wife quarreling, a child stealing, a man doing such things as minding children while the mother worked, Alexi staggering home, the Newfoundlanders fishing and drying fish, etc., always brought an audible response in the form of murmurs, gasps of breath, or whispered comments to a person alongside the viewer.

Another noticeable trend in the comments revealed their perception of poverty in the films. I think in this area the film project did succeed in some measure in getting the people to gain further insight into their own community and also to review their misconceptions of life in southern Canada. Many people were surprised, as mentioned earlier, that white people in the south received welfare assistance; there was also a consensus among viewers that poor people in Aklavik had the advantages of "the bush" to help out when money is scarce and thus were better off than their counterparts in the south. This often expressed appreciation of the bush life -- "We are better off than we think we are." "I'd rather live in Aklavik." -- came

generally from the older people. Whereas the young people did agree that people in the north had natural resources to fall back on, they also tended to express greater interest in southern life. As mentioned earlier, they did perceive to a greater degree the actual poverty shown in the films.

It was more difficult, however, to judge the degree of interest generated by the films in the idea of people discussing their community problems or attempting to run their own affairs. The films of Indians that we used with the intent of stimulating interest in this area were watched very intently, but the ideas or thoughts they aroused were not really revealed. Being a facet of community life that is so closely related to the native's personal sense of identity and self image, in which so many of the people feel threatened, we did not attempt to probe deeper for their reactions. It might be possible, however, to install confidence by continuing to show such films in the community.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The continuation and expansion of adult education through the medium of films.

Northern native people are eager for information on topics such as:

- how to prepare income tax returns
- how to open a bank account
- what is involved in hamlet status
- what are the children learning in school
- what opportunities exist beyond the community for young people finishing school

Although films are not usually available on some of the suggested topics, they could be produced locally on video-tape (see recommendation 3). For learning about other northern communities, about Canada and other countries, the National Film Board and other agencies have many films.

2. The encouragement of local film production by the people of Aklavik and similar communities.

The pilot project was limited in that it did not generate real discussion of community problems. The "Challenge for Change" type of program could stimulate discussion and action within and between settlements.

Because of the reticence of Indian and Eskimo people to discuss community affairs, I suggest that the positive aspects of local life could be dealt with first, such as the preservation on film of folklore, traditional skills and games.

3. The use of video-tape and closed-circuit television equipment.

Video-tape is cheaper than 16 mm film; it can be replayed without processing; it is easier to use, technically, than 16 mm film and cameras, and many northern

people served by the CBC have television sets.

The adult education service of the Territorial government might be the best initiator of a video-tape film project. Since more community residents i.e. teachers, tend to be transient, the community council might undertake to make films, seeking such help and advice as it wished from within the community, and with the adult educator as resource person.

4. Locally-made films, whether 16 mm or on video-tape, be circulated in a community exchange program. The need for better communication between communities was expressed by the people of Aklavik. They are interested in the operation of housing associations, co-operatives and community development programs all over the north.

